

he married her (5:32). Sadly, unlawful divorces and remarriages saturate our modern age. Those today who call themselves disciples of our Lord are clearly not listening to Him. It is not uncommon to find even members of the church of Christ who are in their second or third marriages (in which neither death nor fornication ended the first marriage). In the world it is even worse. The number of school age children living with parents in their only marriage is shockingly low. Many kids have more step-parents than they have shoes.

Making oaths (5:33-37). The Lord taught His disciples that honesty was a priority. The practice of making oaths had become a game to the Jews. They would invoke certain names or holy things in their oaths to make them sound official and solemn, but then they would excuse themselves from keeping their oaths. Jesus taught that this was hypocrisy and sinful. If one were going to make an oath, he shouldn't vow by this or that, rather one should "...let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (vs. 37). Surely the scribes and Pharisees liked looking good for making solemn oaths, but people ignored the fact that their oaths went unfulfilled. This should never characterize the Lord's people.

Vengeance (5:38-42). Jesus forbade His disciples to take vengeance on those who did them harm. Instead, He taught His people to be forgiving and to turn the other cheek. Forbearance and kindness, not retribution, ought to characterize those who love God. It would become a sad reality in the many centuries after Christ that those who love the Lord and follow Him as disciples would suffer persecution. Jesus said in the Beatitudes that one ought to rejoice when such persecution comes (5:10-12). Many of those who heard Jesus preach these words would probably lose their lives for their faith in the coming years. The apostles except for John all would die for Him. When we think of all of this sacrifice we are reminded that hatred, anger, and vengeance against evil men has no place in a disciples' life.

Love your enemies (5:43-48). Here is where the "rubber meets the road" where the heart of a disciple is concerned. Jesus said that one must love his enemies. This is hard, but necessary. Anyone, even the tax collectors, could love the people who did them good, but only one who mimics the Lord will love the man who hates and mistreats him.

In all of these instructions Jesus was telling His disciples how to "*be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" (5:48). Are you a disciple as described in this beautiful sermon? Where do you fall short?

(More on the Sermon on the Mount next week)

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July 26, 2020

The Sermon on the Mount (1)

David Weak

You have heard of the **Sermon on the Mount**, but do you know what the sermon was about? When was it preached? Who was present to hear it? And what were the themes that Jesus preached about that day?

Surely, men are correct when they call the Sermon on the Mount the most sublime of all sermons. Let us examine it's content today.

The *Sermon on the Mount* was preached by Jesus at the beginning of His earthly ministry. Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. ch. 3), and was then tempted by the devil in the wilderness (ch. 4). Soon thereafter, Jesus left Nazareth and traveled to Capernaum, a town located by the Sea of Galilee, where He would often preach for the next three years (4:13). In these early days Jesus' message mirrored that of John the Baptist, who preached: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (vs. 17).

It was during these days that

Jesus chose four men to be His disciples, Peter and Andrew, and James and John, two sets of brothers (vs. 17-22). These men would be some of Jesus' closest companions during his earthly ministry.

As Jesus preached in Galilee, His fame spread rapidly, and soon people from *Syria, Galilee, Decapolis, Judea*, and beyond the Jordan came to hear Him preach (vs. 23-25). It wasn't long until Jesus looked upon multitudes of people who wanted to hear His words of life (5:1).

Why did Jesus climb into a "mountain" (probably just a hill or a low bluff)? The answer is plain enough to see. Jesus wanted to be able to address the whole crowd. On ground level, the Lord would only have been audible to the first few rows of people. This sets a precedent for gospel preachers: the gospel was meant to be *preached and heard* clearly. Preachers should labor to speak plainly and with good volume

in order to be easily heard, and he should speak when the audience is attentive to his sermon. This should be motivation enough for preachers to work on their communication skills. What good would it do an audience for the preacher to mumble timidly? Paul said such an exercise would be fruitless and would lead to confusion (see: 1 Corinthians 14:6-11).

Next, our text tells us that Jesus was seated when He spoke His great sermon. Jesus indicated with this gesture that this was teaching, not pontificating. When Jesus spoke, He spoke as a man to men. He addressed the people without all of the pomp and ceremony with which the scribes and Pharisees preached (see: Matthew 23:5-7). Secondly, that Jesus was seated before He spoke would be a signal to the audience that they ought to get comfortable and settle in for a lengthy discourse of great importance.

There is entirely too much concern among brethren and preachers about sermon length. What we ought to be more concerned about is content. Sometimes there is a lot of material to cover and it needs to be covered in one lesson. Other times the sermon can be effectively divided into multiple parts. Then there are times when the sermon might just be short and to the point. In the case of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached for what in our Bible is three full chapters. It wasn't a short discourse at all.

Preachers do not owe their audiences any apology for preaching the truth fully and plainly. It is not an intrusion on brethren's time when the sermon extends a little longer than it

might normally. What exactly is "over time" anyway? Where in the Bible was the acceptable time limit for sermons set? Is it twenty minutes, is it thirty-five minutes? If a sermon goes forty minutes is it acceptable, but forty-five is too much? I wonder what brethren are so busy with on the Lord's day that it would hurt them to be delayed from the activity by a few extra minutes? Our focus on the Lord's day should be on the Lord, not time.

What preachers should do is "preach the word" with urgency (2 Timothy 4:2). A rambling, pointless, and stumbling discourse is not good, but a meaty, passionate, well-presented one is very good. Paul once preached until midnight (Acts 20:27). The Jews once listened attentively to the priests preach from "morning until midday" (Nehemiah 8:3). Moreover, the audience stood up (vs.5), and when the preaching was over, the people said "Amen, Amen!" (5-6). The problem usually isn't longwinded preachers, it usually the lack of interest among the hearers.

Finally, the text tells us that once Jesus was seated, "...He opened his mouth and taught them,..." (5:2). When Christians gather for worship or Bible study, the word of God ought to be well and fully taught. There is no authority for the church to assemble on the Lord's day for social meals or entertainment. Christians gathered to hear the "apostle's doctrine" (Acts 2:42). Sermons should be well-studied and clear presentations of divine truth. Brethren who hear the gospel preached and who sit in Bible classes should come away with their knowledge, faith, and

commitment to the Lord increased.

Now, what were the themes that Jesus spoke about in the great Sermon on the Mount?

Principally, the Sermon on the Mount was an expose of the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus taught His disciples what the nature of true discipleship is. He contrasted true righteousness with the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Early in the sermon he said the following: "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). What Jesus meant by this is that true righteousness must be of a more genuine quality than that of the scribes and Pharisees.

The Beatitudes (5:3-12). In this first main section of the sermon, Jesus told his disciples that being blessed had nothing to do with seeking the things hypocrites do, but seeking things like *humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, and peace*. The general attitude among Jews, which was fostered by the scribes and Pharisees was that appearance was all that mattered (Matthew 6:5; 23:5). Men sought to fulfill their own wishes rather than humbly submitting to the Lord.

Salt and light (5:13-16). Jesus exhorted His disciples to be lights to the world and to be salt of the earth. These figures of speech were as clear as a bell to anyone who was listening. Everyone knew that salt seasoned food, and once the salt, gathered from the deposits along the seashore were used up, all that was left was dross.

If it could no longer season food, it was no good. Likewise, lamps were to give light to dark places. A lamp hidden under a basket was useless. Disciples should spread the light of righteousness and truth to everyone around them.

Sin begins in the heart (5:21-30). Jesus reminded His audience what the scribes and Pharisees taught about sin. They only concentrated on the very act of sin, such as murder and adultery. But, Jesus told his audience that sin started in the heart. Just because a man did not murder didn't mean he was innocent. If he hated his brother without a cause, he was just a step away from murder. Likewise, because a man refrained from adultery, didn't mean he was innocent of the thing that led to adultery. It was just as sinful to look at a woman to lust for her. Once a man lusted willfully, only time and opportunity prevented him from actually committing adultery.

Marriage and divorce (5:31-32). The scribes and Pharisees hung their hats on Moses' "allowance" which permitted the Jews to give their mates a "certificate of divorce" (5:31). Jesus dealt with this directly later in the gospel of Matthew, telling the Jews that Moses tolerated this practice, "but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). As part of Jesus' primer on true discipleship, He taught the people that divorce was only permitted by God when one's mate committed fornication. To divorce one's wife for any other reason made her an adulteress when she married again, and it made the second husband an adulterer when

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